

# **CIVIL AIR PATROL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW**

WNHC 23.83-11

MR. WILLIAM L. HEIM



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Headquarters Civil Air Patrol  
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CIVIL AIR PATROL  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview

of

Mr. William L. "Bill" Heim

by

Col. Lester E. Hopper, CAP

Date: 17 September 1983

Location: Little Rock, Arkansas

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

That I, WILLIAM L. HEIM, have this day participated in an oral-magnetic-taped interview with COL. L. E. HOPPER, CAP, covering my best recollections of events and experiences which may be of historical significance to the Civil Air Patrol.

I understand that the tape(s) and the transcribed manuscript resulting therefrom will be accessioned into the Civil Air Patrol's Historial Holdings. In the best interest of the Civil Air Patrol, I do hereby voluntarily give, transfer, convey, and assign all right, title, and interest in the memoirs and remembrances contained in the aforementioned magnetic tapes and manuscript to the Civil Air Patrol, to have and to hold the same forever, hereby relinquishing for myself, my executors, administrators, heirs, and assigns all ownership, right, title, and interest therein to the donee expressly on the condition of strict observance of the following restrictions:

NONE

William L. Heim DONOR

Dated 9/17/83

Accepted on behalf of the Civil Air Patrol by

L. E. Hopper  
L. E. HOPPER  
COL CAP  
Dated 9/17/83

## CIVIL AIR PATROL ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Civil Air Patrol Oral History interviews were initiated in early 1982 by Lt. Col. Lester E. Hopper, CAP, of the Civil Air Patrol's National Historical Committee. The overall purpose of these interviews is to record for posterity the activities of selected members of the Civil Air Patrol.

The principle goal of these histories is to increase the base of knowledge relating to the early accomplishments of Civil Air Patrol members who in their own unique way contributed to the defense of our great country. Certainly not of a secondary nature is the preservation of the contributions of individuals as Civil Air Patrol continues its growth.



## FOREWORD .

The following is the transcript of an oral history interview recorded on magnetic tape. Since only minor emendations have been made, the reader should consistently bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. Additionally, no attempt to confirm the historical accuracy of the statements has been made. As a result, the transcript reflects the interviewee's personal recollections of a situation as he remembered it at the time of the interview.

Editorial notes and additions made by CAP historians are enclosed in brackets. If feasible, first names, ranks, or titles are also provided. Any additions, deletions and changes subsequently made to the transcript by the interviewee are not indicated. Researchers may wish to listen to the actual interview tape prior to citing the transcript.

## SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

In this oral history Mr. William L. "Bill" Heim recounts his experiences before, during and after his service at Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base 9 on Grand Isle, Louisiana. He covers his early flying experiences in Little Rock, Arkansas, and his somewhat hasty departure for active duty with Civil Air Patrol. His review of the building and equipping of Grand Isle as a base of operations sheds significant light on that subject. The experiences he relates as regards his contacts with others at the base vividly recalls many details of day to day life. His evaluation of the base command and operations provides needed information on these important areas.

He relates his post-Coastal Patrol wartime experiences as well as those which occurred after World War II.



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## CAP ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Number: WNHC 23.83-11  
Taped Interview With: Mr. William L. Heim  
Date of Interview: September 17, 1983  
Location: Little Rock, Arkansas  
Conducted by: Colonel Lester E. Hopper, CAP

H: Interview conducted with Mr. William L. "Bill" Heim in Little Rock, Arkansas, on September the 17th 1983, as relates to Mr. Heim's experience as a pilot and other details of his operations while stationed at Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Base 9 in Grand Isle, Louisiana. Bill, suppose we start off with a little bit of background, your family's background. Did you have any military tradition in your family? What kind of education? When you got interested in aviation, just tell a little bit about that.

HM: Well, my father was German. He came from Germany when he was three years old. My mother was English, she was born in this country. Fact, other than Mike and I, we were the only two with any military experience at all. The others were either too old,

or were in between the ages, you see, and I was in High School. First, to get back to this aviation; I just don't really remember when it started, but it was a long time ago, when I was a young kid. As I told you, the four of us bought that old airplane for five hundred dollars and we flew it around. I guarantee you, we must have flown four or five hundred hours between us.

H: Now that was before the war...

HM: Well, before the war, when the war began--got started--you either belonged to the CAP or you wasn't going to fly that airplane. They would have stopped you. So anyway, Mister Mike, my brother, he'd...I'd watch out the front, be sure the inspector wasn't coming, and he'd overhaul that old airplane. We overhauled it four or five times. It took all of us, but we did some other aircraft and engine work for Central too at times. Not under an A & E see, but we flew it and we learned about it. Like I told you, we were very poor. We got our instructions in for dual, was eight dollars; you could rent an airplane for six dollars an hour.

H: Six dollars for airplane, two dollars for instructor...

HM: Yeah, well, but we was only able, about every other week, to get a half hour. We just didn't have the money in those days, which was back in thirty eight or something like that. Anyway, we really got interested in it, so we got some CAA books, you



know they were free. We read all about all that stuff at home, but we didn't read far enough; that you couldn't do aerobatics with a J2 Cub for an hour. We was looping it, just like I told you earlier. Hell, I got it upside down and landed, it just fell all to pieces. But I straightened it out and Rippberger took it out the hangar a day or so later. He went down there to Pine Bluff. Guy put the gas in, you know how they shake the wings, kind of checking, man, that thing was rattling all in there. He took the pressure plates off, all them little wires running between every one of them was busted. That was from getting it upside down, but I didn't know anything about that then. I notice it said, when they called you down there, you know for active duty, I don't ever recall, I'm sure I signed up for it, but one day...

H: Excuse me, going back a little bit, because of the fact you couldn't fly, was that your motivation to get into CAP or why did you get into CAP?

HM: No, no, to be very frank, when they first started the draft and they ran their hand the bowl and got the things up, my brother Mike and I both, next day names was in the paper. We just like flying, especially, like I told you, he was a boat racer and all that sort of thing, that fairly interested him, and I liked it. I started flying before he did, not long however. One Saturday afternoon I got a call out to the packing house, oh around five, six o'clock, and they told me be out here at Abbott Field at ten o'clock in the morning. Aircraft would pick me up,

had the orders on board. I guess I don't recall whether Rex Hays called me, or who called me, but I believe it was the secretary of somebody. But anyway, I was out there. Said bring your gear. I got out there and there was a fellow named Cash. I don't recall his first name, he had a 105 Stinson. They gave us our papers and told us to open them after we got in the air. So we left. Told us we're heading for New Orleans. We got out charts ready and we started for New Orleans. We went into Pascagoula, Mississippi and the grass was high, man, we couldn't hardly get out. We ran about as far as we could go and then gave it full flap, got over a fence and got out. Well, we hit Pontchartrain, that was the biggest body of water we'd ever seen, at least I had. We started right on across, the old airplane started missing...

H: They always miss over water...

HM: Yeah, evidently...So anyway, we land over there and one of the cylinders was cracked. As well as I can recall, that airplane was left at New Orleans and they picked us up, took us to Grand Isle by a courier they had. When I got there, there couldn't have been over eight or ten people down there, I don't think...

H: Do you remember what month that was, Bill?

HM: It was July the 26th, 1942 when I got there.



H: Now kind of an intriguing story, Rex Hays called you and told you to be out here at the airport. At that time were you a CAP member, before?

HM: Oh yeah, I'd been on there since they had the CAP. When it started, we started.

H: You don't by any chance remember your CAP serial number do you?

HM: No, but I remember the Air Force 386...whatever it was...

H: Your CAP serial number, the last three or four digits of it will tell you how early you were.

HM: Well, I really just don;t remember.

H: It's some place around, you'll run across it one of these days. Apparently you must have indicated your willingness to go through active duty with CAP...

HM: We probably signed up for it, I don't doubt that in the least. It's been a long time...

H: The normal thing with somebody volunteering, eventually they call, them, but you got a kind of quick call...

HM: Yeah, well, when I got there though they didn't have a

hangar up, they just didn't have anything down there...

H: Why don't you give me your first impression? Let's just play a game, Bill Heim just flew into Grand Isle and what did you see...

HM: Man I'm going to be very frank. I didn't see much of anything. I saw an old gasoline truck there, and a red Ford stick bed truck, and this big old administration building that at one time must have been some kind of old hotel or something down on one end of this island. And when I say it was just shell road...

H: Is that what you landed on, a shell road?

HM: Yeah and after we got it all completed up that's still all we had. We had one eight hundred foot, one twelve hundred, and I think, I don't know what the middle one that we bulldozed up in there, how long it was, but I presume it was about a thousand feet.

H: Twelve hundred foot runway, you called your long one...

HM: That was the long one.

H: How many other people were there before you, Bill?

HM: I don't really remember. Eight or ten people down there as well as I recall. Nobody mentioned it, but there was a boy named Andy Cohen there and he was kind of working in the office and doing a lot. He evidently knew quite a bit about it. I think Blocker was there, and of course Major Armstrong was there. A couple of fellows that I just don't recall their names, but they didn't stay there. As soon as we got going, they left. I think Mac and Ken were bringing the equipment down there to set up. When I got there they didn't have the transmitter or anything...

H: The radio wasn't in then?

HM: No, we didn't have the antennas up either, and like I...

H: So you were actually...it was kind of primitive then...

HM: Yeah, we didn't even have generators mounted. The two generators, we had to mount them up high. When we get pretty high water comes across, when they had a little hurricane out there it washed all the way across that island. They told me many times that they tied themselves in those big trees, monstrous trees, in the center of the island. They'd climb right up and tie themselves in there until it blew itself out. I think it was either the third or four...anyway I hadn't been there very long...before we got to that though, my exacted month to the day, my brother showed up with Ripberger.

H: It would have been August...



HM: August the 26th, and Ripberger was in his airplane and Mike was the navigator. Well, when we got down there most all the airplanes except Rippberger's was pretty new. McIntish's airplane was pretty new, and the one that belonged to Joe Helk. I believe over at Shreveport, pretty new. It was that Cessna that we had talked about earlier. A few things like that, but they really didn't have anything operational of any kind going. After we got down there, Mike got there, we went out a few trips...

H: Well what did you do when you first got there, that month before Mike got there?

HM: Oh man, we graded up the road. They had an old grader down there that belonged to the county I guess, and they graded it off some. We started working on putting up the antennas...

H: You weren't flying at that time, you were just...

HM: No, we were just working down there, trying to get it so we could get some airplanes in there.

H: Nobody was flying during that period, they was still flying out of New Orleans or what?

HM: They were flying out of New Orleans in the very beginning as well as I recall. Because we'd seen them coming over, see and

the fact I'm sure they were, because we were down there trying to get things,...we didn't have any facilities. After we finally got the thing started and they got going. People began to come in. Oh man, they had some of those airplanes, lord..they'd about had it before we got 'em. Some of them were as old as could be. Fact, one of them we was talking about, it started with air. Had one of those hand crankers, which wasn't too far back...We had a lot of them prop swingers too, you know, everything just didn't work. A little later, some, like I said, came in with a gull wing Stinson and then we got some more eighty and ninety horse power Stinsons, the small ones you know. We had those and probably more Fairchilds, and Wacos, and Stinsons than anything else, when we really got it going. But the airplanes were old, parts weren't available., fact they didn't have any equipment hardly at all. So they sent Mike and I back to Little Rock because Mike, he had a lot of metal lathes and things like that, that he loved, that was his life, that machinist thing. So we went up there, we got all the stuff...I do believe they had the welders down there though. But I think we brought an electric welder with us too as well as I recall and we brought all kinds...

H: And those were just your own tools you took down there to set up, yours and Mike's tools?

HM: Well, they was Mike's. They just didn't have anything to work on with...So we took everything we have because we had to close our business down.

H: Okay, you closed your business down and moved down there lock, stock and barrel?

HM: Yeah, because there was just three of us boys and my father and he was old. That's the way it started out. We went down there. I wasn't long before Mr. Mike got some of those old clonkers that had been sitting there...first thing you know he'd have one in the air, one after another. Then I think we probably got them all flying except one, I believe.

H: Henry Muns, I believe, and Mike were kind of the engineering officers, weren't they?

HM: Yeah, Henry Muns was a fine fellow. Then he had Willie Lum and then had Patterson, his name was Bill as I recall. They worked good though, because like I told you, Mr. Mike was mild mannered, shy sort of fellow. But he was really a genius on whatever had to be done to make it go. If it hadn't been for him, a lot of those airplanes would have never flown off of there. I don't know, we made many many missions out, like I told you, according to that book I left you out, believe. I don't really recall what was in the other book, but there's about three hundred hours in that book...

H: That was after you started flying. But when you first went down there, you were mostly just to get the base started right?



HM: That's right. Les, and I went down there as a navigator...

H: Okay, you went down as a navigator but they put you to work on the ground...

HM: Well, there wasn't anything to navigate until we got something to navigate from. We spent a lot of time trying to get things in order and they began to get it in shape. I will, let's say, I ride Ripberger all the time and always did. We'd been good friends for many years, had the airplane before we got together. Like I told you, he got them on the ball, now. He'd get down there and if it would look like the boys were getting too restless, and getting into trouble, you know how every young man will do, and he started having them move that sod. We wore that sod out, planting it here, and move it back and forth. But he was fair with everybody. He just told them how it was and that's what we'd do. We was only down there for one thing, and if it's your time to go, you're going.

H: That was the only way, you know. The operations officer's job was tough.

HM: That's right.

H: Okay now, basically you went down there as a navigator and most of your missions was as a navigator or were you a pilot later on?

HM: When after we'd been there about, oh, a few months, that book will tell you, we got two weeks off, Samuel Bidaletteral and myself and I believe DeClerk, we came up here...

H: Bidaletteral and you and who else?

HM: DeClerk. We came up and we took some school. We'd already taken our written work and we got our private license. When we went back, why then they checked us out. We would fly a little...mostly courier service to New Orleans and back and forth. Of course we flew every flight, but not as the pilot itself, landing and taking off. As well as I recall, when I finally went into the Air Force I think I had twelve hundred hours.

H: You put up a mess of them in a short period of time.

HM: Yeah, we flew a lot.

H: What was your schedule, mornings, evenings, or how did you all work on that?

HM: They had a regular roster. In other words if you flew dawn patrol, they wasn't going...you got more than one a day. They'd probably put you on the last flight. They tried to give you a little break in between. They didn't give you, go out two hours or whatever it is, and come back two hours and go back, they'd try to break it up for us. If they had enough guys to go around, you

just got maybe the one flight a day. And some of them were longer than others, depends on the amount of the convoy and how big it was. Pascagoula would bring it so far, we'd take it from there, and somebody else from Beaumont would get it a little further on, you know.

H: Basically, that was convoy escort duty or what?

HM: Partially that's what we really did. We'd try to circle and stay around those convoys as much to let them know that there was an aircraft in the air. We presume that helped them stay down. However there was routing, I'm sure, but that's what we did the most.

H: So you circled around the convoy and just followed it as it progressed through the Gulf?

HM: Yep, that was our primary target, I think, was to do that.

H: And you picked it up from either Pascagoula or Beaumont which ever direction it was going and handed it off to the other one. How much did you ever go out just to search an area, looking for submarines or anything like that?

HM: Sometimes, of course, we wouldn't know that I'm sure that the captain and them had it, but they'd tell us to search. Everything was marked out in different quadrants, search quadrant number three and four or whatever it was. We'd go specifically



for that and were looking for any kind of debris or anything. Evidently there's been some kind of torpedo or something in the area or some one had been sighted. And we'd see some stuff out there occasionally, you know...

H: Such as...

HM: Well, these crates and stuff floating around and somebody...a ship had been sunk there was no doubt about all the debris that was there wasn't...

H: How about survivors, did you spot any survivors while you were doing that or anything?

HM: I never did. But we'd be out there looking. I never really did see any, but I knew there were some from the other people who'd seen them, this and that, but they followed them in you know.

H: Now when you circled these convoys, you were out for two hours at a time, four hours at a time, or how long?

HM: Well, it depended on what kind of aircraft we had as how much time. We would stay out there as long as we had fuel to get back on. They knew where we were going to leave it and Pascagoula or somebody else was supposed to try and pick it up as soon as possible. Now I'm sure there were some times areas in which they had no coverage at all just because we couldn't cover it all.

H: So you flew, say in the morning, and then they tried to give you a break and you flew later that night. Did you fly seven days a week or how?

HM: Well, now, I can't remember. Maybe they had a day or two off occasionally, but I don't remember just how that was. If it was, it didn't matter, we wasn't going anywhere anyway.

H: Wasn't too many places to go on Grand Isle.

HM: No, there sure wasn't. But a man that really liked to fly like we did, we enjoyed it.

H: That's what you were there for...

HM: Yeah, and we liked it. I personally, I thought they did a pretty good job. I'm not trying to pat them on the back but the discipline was pretty good. If it had to be done, all of them would do it, there wasn't any passing the buck.

H: Passing the buck?

HM: No, everybody did their part and that was the way we did it.

H: Do you remember anything about your radios? Aircraft you've pretty well covered. How was your radio equipment down there in the airplane?

HM: Well, occasionally you'd get an airplane that had a pretty good one. But most of them was flipped. After a while, after we'd been there quite a while, I can't remember but I think I was down there about eighteen months, well I was there when the start of winter then and how ever long I was there...

H: Well that'd be from July. You said you went down there in July I believe.

HM: The twenty-sixth of July, yes.

H: You finished in August of '43.

HM: So that was about a good year.

H: Yeah, thirteen, fourteen months.

HM: They began to improve the radios as they went along. They just didn't have the facilities, or the money, you know, I guess.

H: None of that was provided by the government. All that was provided by individuals.

HM: I think that I didn't own that airplane, but I think they just paid them so much as hour, the government did. And we had to maintain it down there.



H: Paid them little or nothing an hour, I've got the schedules on it.

HM: Well I'm sure it wasn't much.

H: I figure the guy who got rich off of that was the insurance company, because the insurance payment was twice that everything else was. You had to go right to the insurance company.

HM: Well you see a lot of those old airplanes had a lot of time on 'em before we ever got them.

H: You had a couple of stagger wings didn't you?

HM: Yeah they were good ones too, old Wacos back there, they was custom jobs. Bob Smith had one. Little bitty fellow. Samuel Bidaletteral came with him I believe, and there was another one, I don't recall who it belonged to, but they were a good stable old airplane and they would take a load. You didn't have to worry about it, you know.

H: Did you have any Beech Stagger wings or just the Wacos down there?

HM: I kind of think might have been one Beech, I'm not sure but I believe there was one Beech.

H: Somebody told me you had a fancy red Beech that came down from someplace up in New York at one time or another.

HM: I kinda believe that too. Lower protruded out in front of the upper wing, right?

H: Either far behind, I don't remember which.

HM: Yeah, I don't either but I believe it was out in front.

H: B2, this is a Beech 17B or something like that.

HM: I don't remember just what it was but I do believe that's true.

H: Of course you had the Fleetwings "Seabird". Did you ever get to fly it?

HM: I'd been in all of them. But like I told you the time we got our license and things, we flew on every flight, but the pilot, we already had the pilots, they were in charge. But we would fly the doctor back and forth and all that sort of thing to build you up a little.

H: You're welcome to it. When you got your time built up you became a pilot instead of a navigator?

HM: They raised you from a flight officer, which was a navigator, to a second lieutenant when you got your license and you were checked out. But they actually never put you out in charge of flight in the Gulf until we had sufficient pilots for that. And like I told you, I wasn't bragging, but I was a pretty good navigator.

H: Bill, You weren't bragging, everybody else was bragging on you.

HM: Well I had too. But you know what I'm talking about, you had to have them both.

H: You didn't have all those radios to help you back then that you have now.

HM: No, we didn't come back on any beam at all. We came back where I had it marked on that chart.

H: How about you personally? Were you involved in any accidents or anything yourself? We'll talk a little bit about Mike's situation later.

HM: No I never, other than like I told you, airplane'd quit on us and we put in on a beach and had a little piece of lead in the gas tank and it would roll back and forth and get over the pipe.



H: Where'd you put that one on the beach? That was where?

HM: Well, that was an island up just east of Timbalier Light, whatever it is.

H: The Ranger, or something like that.

HM: They called it the Lost Island, that's what the natives called it. One time there was a big hotel there and a hurricane came and washed everything off. When it left, it never left a body, a stone, or anything. That's the reason they called it the Lost Island and I think its kind of spooky to them.

H: Mac was telling me. He gave me the name of a book last night that he had just read on it. It's something I'll have to go back and read one of these days. I've heard that story, being old Louisianian and I've heard the story of Grand Chenier or something along that line. It was a great big resort hotel and everything else.

HM: But when the storm was over there wasn't a thing left.

H: I think part of the church bell was left and that was it.

HM: They was having a big reception there when the storm came at the,, a big falderal. We'd have things like that, but they'd be about all.

H: And you put it there. That was the only one you ever had to put down in a emergency like that or did you have to do that other times? By the way what kind of airplane was that?

HM: It was a Fairchild.

H: Fairchild Ranger or what?

HM: No, no, it was a Warner I believe, a hundred and forty five Warner. Markovacowitz was the pilot and he brought the airplane. I don't know who it belonged to, it wasn't his, but he brought it down there. Dimitri there, he had a Ranger, but I flew it many times but I never did...

H: Okay while you were doing all those things, did you spot any submarines yourself or foreign aircraft appear?

HM: Personally I never did say that I really spotted a submarine. But I certainly been right where one had just been and done this damage. Because, like I told you, you could see debris and stuff so I knew he been there. You look so hard that the first thing you know, you kind of think you see it. You know what I'm saying? If the sun is just right you can look down you could see way down. The water's clear as can be. At one time we thought sure we saw one, we reported it and that's as far as I know about it.

H: Did you drop a bomb on what you thought you saw before you reported it?

HM: No, but other than that, I really never had any real problem of my own down there.

H: How about you telling us something of that taking off with bombs and depth charges in a single engine airplane got to be an interesting experience, didn't it?

HM: Yeah, it was kind of exciting, and like I told you, the trip I had with that old gentleman was real exciting. I know after we passed the administration building, go down both sides of the ditch and back up, we did get it stopped before it went off the end.

H: Did you have a bomb on board then?

HM: No, we didn't.

H: Fortunate.

HM: Very fortunate. Then the next morning we'd take off, the same fellow and I, dawn patrol, and they couldn't get the antenna out. So we had to make another landing and I'm dead from yesterday's landing. This one was a little better, however. He was really probably a pretty good pilot, he just had to get broke in



a little bit.

H: Probably a good pilot on a nice smooth runway but not down on a shell road.

HM: That's right.

H: That shell road was probably spooky to a lot of people.

HM: It was. But you'd be surprised, once you put it down on there, it was just as nice as could be. They kept it graded to keep the ribs out of it. It was all right.

H: The shells compact real well.

HM: It breaks up into little....

H: They make cement out of shell.

HM: It breaks down into little pieces, you know.

H: How about your living conditions down there? How did you live and where'd you end up?

HM: Well, first I lived at the hotel down there. It was one small room, about the size of this, one bath down the hall that was it, the lavatory. I stayed there for awhile and then we rented a little house from Reddin up at Golden Meadows. Had a little, a very small one. It wasn't great, but it was livable

and we cleaned it up and stuff.

H: Was that you and Mike or your family?

HM: No, just my wife.

H: Your wife and you. Did you have any children at that time?

HM: No.

H: She just moved down there from Little Rock with you?

HM: After awhile she came. Mike's wife came, they both came some time later on.

H: So you just left home and everything else and went down there to do your duty, so to speak.

HM: That's right.

H: At the time you were how old?

HM: I was twenty five I believe at the time. It wasn't bad down there...in war time and like a lot of other times you have just have to do the best you can with what you have, you know. So we made out all right, we didn't eat the fanciest, but we had food and I didn't see anybody shrinking up much.

H: Nobody's a rock, everybody survived. How did you find the local people, pretty friendly or...

HM: ...I'm going to say this my brother and I, we made a friend of every native on that island. A lot of people not that far south as us appeared to feel a little superior to these people. Those people down there were just as important to me as anybody else. We'd fish. You see, when we were coming in on a flight, if the time of day was right you could see all the fish migrating into Barataria Bay or one of the big bays. Shark going through them occasionally. Well I knew the fishing hole would be there. So we all, everybody'd go up there and go fishing. Man we'd catch a gang, and not once have I ever had to clean a fish, all the time I was there. Native guys done that, and I'm not asking them, they just did.

H: Outsiders don't have a tendency to understand just how good those people were down there.

HM: Those people live a different life, things are different down there. They have to acclimate themselves to the conditions they had. I'm gonna tell you this, I thought they did real well, everyone of them. They had a lady there that took care of the house there. Enoch's wife; anything they could do to help you. We paid them, but money wasn't a big thing down there because there wasn't very much of it, for one thing.



H: They didn't have it.

HM: Talking about money, I understand you didn't get paid too frequently down there.

HM: Well, they paid, but the checks was always late. It would be awhile before you get them. But old Walter Blocker, he'd go up to Raceland, I believe that bank. Whatever money, they knew what everybody's check would be, and he'd draw, get that much money out. When the check came, they'd all sign them and give them back to him and he'd put them back in.

H: That kind of kept it going for you.

HM: Yeah, anytime we'd get out. Then if you had to, you could go to Milliet's and maybe if you didn't get paid, they'd credit you for the groceries.

H: Basically what you're saying, I guess, there was a pretty united spirit, not only among the people on the base about the war effort but the locals too.

HM: Oh, you bet. Now they say some of them cooperated by going out (helping German submarines). I'm sure some of that stuff happened, but they didn't necessarily have to come from Grand Isle, they could come out of any of those inland water ways or all the way from New Orleans. Fact is, they didn't get to haul

the stuff our of there anyway.

H: Well, there's been a lot of stories about that, you know, supporting the German submarines from Grand Isle and from every place else. I never have been able to really find any great deal of credibility about it.

HM: No, no, no.

H: I do have an interview scheduled with a German U-boat commander. That one is going to be real interesting, talking to him now. He came to this country after the war, he's now a Mississippi River boat pilot.

HM: Is that right?

H: He had some interesting stories to tell about the fact that he could come ashore...could have pretty much since his mother was an American. And he could come ashore and you know...

HM: Yeah, pass himself off...

H: Pass himself off, but he never did. That's second hand, I haven't had a chance to really sit down and talk with him. I'm really looking forward to it, because he ought to have a real...Interesting pile of sea story to tell. Well, you stayed there pretty much to the end then, until August of '43 right?

HM: Yeah, I think I left when they closed down, best as I recall.

H: When they closed the official operation, people like Mac stayed on to close it down. Let me ask you something about the base itself. On a kind of an overall evaluation, how well, was the base equipped when it finally got up. I realize it started from nothing.

HM: Well, once they got everything going, we didn't have the finest equipment and stuff in the world, but I say this, they had everything they ever wanted. The maintenance, we couldn't complain about that at all. I say this, I was in the Air Force after that, and there was a lot more snaffoos in the Air Force than we had down there.

H: You probably didn't have people that was quite as dedicated. Across the board, how about your management, command, was it pretty well commanded? You answer it, I won't presume...

HM: No, there's no doubt about that. Like I told you, they had some problems with some of the commanders and this and that, little things. You got to remember, I tried to see both sides. That fellow that came from up north, he had a helluva time adjusting to all those Cajuns, and us too. So he had a problem about as well as we did, I guess. Now like the people like

Ripberger there, Ripberger run a tight ship. I've known Ripberger for years an years, but he told me the same damn thing he told everybody else...

H: Well when I say command, I mean that, the whole...the operations officer, the aerodrome officer, all of them.

HM: That's right.

H: You found them to be pretty good managers, then?

HM: Dog gone tooten, sure did, I thought they did fine.

H: How about your operations, pretty well effective? You made all your flights on schedule and...

HM: They took pride in that, though. They kept those airplanes on time. Of course every once in awhile, one would get way out there and it would start breaking down, they'd have to come in, we'd send another aircraft out.

H: Now how did you fly? Did you fly two airplanes at a time, all the time?

HM: Two. We'd stay within sight of one another, we didn't...

H: Was one of them high and one of them low?

HM: Well, little bit normally, one was a little higher than the



other and we'd stay about a half or a quarter mile, half mile apart.

H: You remember the altitude you normally flew those two airplanes at?

HM: Well, they were talking about 500 in there, but it appeared to me as well as I recall, we was flying around anywhere from two to five. Depends on how far we were trying to see and what we were looking for.

H: And the time of the day, and where the sun was. I do a little bit of, well I don't anymore, but I've done a lot of search work down there, so I know some of the problems. Okay what's your personal overall evaluation in the effectiveness of the base. Do you think it was well run?

HM: Personally I really thought it was. I didn't know anything about the military prior to that. But after leaving there and going to the military, I really thought it was operated properly.

H: How much did it help you when you got into military? Your drill was out of the way and you knew the routines and everything...

HM: Yes, I was pretty well qualified when I got there. When I left there, I came to Pine Bluff. DeClerk and I went out in a

cadre. We were going to get a job at Grotta Field. They checked us out that one day, soloed, let them go in a PT19. We was doing our regular stuff before we took over on classes, you know. Flat getting used to the area and the aircraft and stuff. We hadn't had any open cockpit airplanes at all down there. We were flying around, we hadn't been made instructors yet. We were coming along okay. They had what they called a hurdle stage, they stretched a rope across the field. That's so you learn. To teach you to make a get in on a sharp runway, get the airplane down, stop it. Well another fella and myself down there and two other instructors, and they had twenty one aircraft lined up there in a row with students. They were all going to shoot these hurdle stages. You know, with all of them, it's always best who gets the closest thing, he got to buy the beer that night. Well anyway, we jacked the seats up a little bit too high that night. Well anyway, we jacked the seats up a little bit too high I think, and lost our perspective exactly. As I'm coming in just over that rope, we started slipping and falling off to the left. With all those airplanes lined up, wasn't anything to do, but give a full throttle, kick a right rudder, what it did, it hit the ground, broke the wheel off, strut off the landing gear, strut went stuck in the ground, the airplane spun around and I'm under the rope. I won the beer, but I got fired.

H: They didn't like you tearing up the airplane.

HM: No, they got upset about it. Well it wasn't so bad, but one kid got killed in traffic that morning. I cracked that one up, the guy came in right behind me. The other guy went down, but

didn't crack his up, but he hit so hard that it busted the spar. So we needed to be fired and they fired us. So I came home and I just waiting until the Army called me. So we went to work over here at Central for Claude Halburn, Mike and I, we'd do maintenance on the airplane, drain the oil and all that stuff at night. Small maintenance, but things that could be done without a A & P. He was well qualified, but he didn't have the license. So we worked over there. Then sounds kinda like a little funnies down here too. Ripberger, Captain and I we got the notice, come down to take our physicals for the draft the same morning. I see him walking in, we going in the door together. "What you doing here Captain?" "Got drafted." So we go in there and we take our physicals and stuff and all the other things you take. I got home about one o'clock or one-thirty, already had my induction papers. They came at eleven, before I ever got home. Evidently they mailed them before I got there, of course they knew we passed the physicals down there. So anyway, the school wanted their money back for the airplane, I guess they put us in there. The Captain and I, we cracked a little beer on that island stuff, so we went and got us a pint of whiskey. He drank half and I drank half. We rented a airplane, wore our wings over there. Man, we went out and if we didn't have a time. We had it where our killing plant was. We had a farm too, and we had some guys working. Man, we'd go through there, getting right down on the ground, doing all the wrong things. We pulled the airplane up and and we took a few trees, a little limbs out of some of the trees. Then Ripberger wanted to go over to North Little Rock to



his mama's house, and he run her in the house too. By the time we got back to the airport, we had every officer, CAA and everybody else was out there waiting for us. They wanted to know all about it. Captain already knew they were looking for him so he told them. We told them we got to go in the service in the morning, we're leaving the next day. The guy said, "Well okay, we're not going to do anything about it, we're just going to put it in the records. If it ever happens again, you get it all at one time. It worked out all right.

H: It sure did. Sounds like you all had a blast though.

HM: Yes we did.

H: Now you went into the service. Did you come back and get associated with CAP when you came back or did you just pretty well drop CAP after you got out?

HM: When I came back from overseas, by then I had a son and no money. I think we had five hundred some dollars in the bank, needed a new refrigerator for the kid's milk to keep it cold. So we went to work. My older brother Mike had started a business up and it was going along pretty good. So I went to work for them. We put in eighteen hours a day for six days a week. We did that for about...I just flew home, I got home in the later part of October, I believe in '45. The first of '46 they just made me equal partners and when we made the money back, we put in my part until I was even with the money they had.



H: You were too busy making a living to play CAP?

HM: We had to if we was going to eat, so we did.

H: That's well understood. We talked a little bit about Mike. Mike was one of those individuals who was involved in an aircraft crash in the war and survived it. How about telling me a little bit about that?

HM: I saw him taking off, they were testing the airplane.

H: What type airplane was it?

HM: It was a Fairchild. I believe it probably had a hundred and twenty five Warmer on it, I believe. But anyway they'd been having trouble with the airplane then. I don't remember now just why, what was the problem it had, but as you pull it up a certain amount... (we had one I told you, we'd turn it left or right, one with a BB or that lead thing'd get in there). Something else was wrong with this one. They kept checking it out down there, back and forth, just running up down the runway. Finally they took off. They went down, they was doing okay. They got up a little, I'm gonna say about two hundred feet or so, maybe a little more, maybe five hundred feet, flown out a pretty good ways from the runway. Down there you run off into water either way you go. The engine would quit them, or was beginning to quit... DeCarlo was

flying and he banked it to the left all the way around. He tried to get it back on the runway but he couldn't get it back. So they hit Bayou Rigeau. The airplane went right on in and DeCarlo came up and saw Mike wasn't there. He went back down there and my understanding is that he unsnapped the buckle and popped his Mae West tubes. They both came up, but had a big knot on his head where he hit the compass. They got the aircraft out later. He'd busted it, but other than that, it was all. It really didn't hurt him any more than that. He really was just kind of on a test flight, what they were doing, far as I recall.

H: That didn't put an end to his flying or anything?

HM: No, oh no.

H: Well Mike was also a pilot in addition to being a mechanic I mean.

HM: Yes. We flew after that. We used to ferry a lot of airplanes. We got back after the war, we got a business really going. Whatever they had, the regulations I forget them, what the initials were now, but we couldn't slaughter but so many cattle a month, hogs or different, whatever species. So the OPS, OPA...

H: Office of Price Administration

HM: We wasn't going to string it out all month. The cost was too great. We'd operate a full two weeks, as far as we could go, if you're the last one. We had two weeks left. We'd ferry airplanes from up in Middletown, Ohio, down here, wherever he wanted 'em/ They paid us a hundred and twenty dollars a piece for flying them, which wasn't bad.

H: No.

HM: It wasn't bad when you wasn't making anything. That's the way we did it, we flew that. He liked to fly just about like me and then he really got into it. We both bought us one of those airplanes up there. We flew it all the time until like I told you when we got those medals down at Grand Isle. We went down in that storm when it took me eight hours to get there. I got out of the airplane over there and I left. I told Mr. Mike, you can have my half and from then on I rode the airline.

H: Then you haven't flown much since then?

HM: Yes, but on the G.I. Bill. DeDlerk and I got that PT-19. The guy was pretty good over there to tie. There wasn't much going on around here just then and he'd let us take off in formation and we'd get out and get them upside down. Pump that woggle pump, see who could stay upside down the longest...

H: The longest to do it...

HM: Yeah, we just had a...

H: Until you was purple?

HM: Yeah, have a good time with them and learned a lot about it too. We just liked it. But Mike flew that other airplane long time. I really don't know what he did with it.

H: You pretty much haven't been flying as of late anyway?

HM: No, no.

H: Can you think of anything else that was special down there for you?

HM: No, no, really like I say, I was tickled that the thing turned out like it did. I hate that there are so few of us left from up here but it won't be long there will be a lot less than that, I guess.

H: That's what happens when you get old.

HM: Getting old...

H: That's why I'm working so hard you know.

HM: I hear you...



H: I haven't quite caught up with you yet, but I'm running fast.

HM: Well I'm kinda lucky though.. Mr. Mike's the only one that's died in our family since my mother died and she was eighty-three. My oldest sister is seventy-seven, be seventy-eight and then I have one younger sister, she's about sixty-two or three. Then I got a brother seventy-five. We were old dudes.

H: Well for what it's worth, it seems to be the more active you were in your youth the longer you live.

HM: Well and I think that and you have to stay active in your older age too. We work at it. My wife and I, we work outside full time. I want to show you those...blooms too. I want you to take that bomb stuff back. I don't want...

H: I appreciate it. What we're going to do, I'm still casting around, but I'm going to get a memorial down at Grand Isle. A bomb and a few other things we have at Williams Airport...Addis, Louisiana.

HM: I know where that it.

H: They have a state aviation museum. And I'm going to get them to give me a display cabinet in there for CAP memorabilia.

HM: Well, that's good.

H: You know we've got some things that come off first. Number one. We have three areas that we want to cover. We are going to get something we want of course at our own headquarters first...At Maxwell Air Force Base. We're committed to a pretty good display at the National Aerospace Museum in Washington. Wright Patterson at Dayton, Ohio. Wright Patterson Air Force Base where the Air Force Museum is. Then, I'm not going to say what's left over, but the things that I think are more appropriate to Louisiana going to be there at Williams Airport. What's your overall evaluation of the worth of the whole program? At the time, do you think it really stemmed the tide for us?

HM: I think we had no alternative but to do that. Maritime didn't have a aircraft, they couldn't take care of it. They had too much other stuff that really had to be handled and if it hadn't been for us we'd lost a lot more ships, in my personal opinion. Not that I would've stopped any of them but...

H: You were one of the ones that did stop them though.

HM: Somebody did. There wasn't any doubt about them being there.

H: No. I think of one of the most descriptive things I've ever heard about that. I was talking to one of the pilots from Beaumont and he told me that he could walk on debris on the shore

from one end of his patrol area to the other. There was so much from sunken ships. There's so much debris down there, that he felt like he could walk on the beach and never touch his feet on the sand, just walk on the debris. I'm sure that's a little bit of an overstatement, but sure too...

HM: Yes, there was a lot of it all up and down the beaches...

H: They pointed out that once they got started in Beaumont, and they started just a little bit behind you, there was one sinking after the time they started. That's a remarkable change.

HM: They went someplace else, anyway, whether we ran them off or not, but I'm sure it had some effect on them. It had to have.

H: I don't think there's any doubt that the CAP filled a gap until, well not only filled a gap, but it yeah filled a gap. It ran them off because it certainly stopped the activity of the submarines. As far as I'm concerned unless you have anything else to add, we'll wrap this up.

HM: No I believe that's it...